

# Rocky Mountain

## Administrative History



## INTRODUCTION

The creation of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915 followed a policy of retaining under the control of the national government land areas of scenic beauty and historic worth in the American West. The policy complemented a program for conserving certain natural resources, such as timber and water, through the establishment of national forests on the public domain. Both types of endeavor had arisen during the period after the Civil War when the public lands were subjected to increasingly rapid absorption and despoliation through private ownership and use. Because of growing concern over these results and the methods employed to accomplish them, far-sighted citizens and organizations promoted measures for preserving the landed heritage of the country through government control.

The first major step in accomplishing the goal of preservation was taken in 1872 when Congress was persuaded to establish Yellowstone National Park in the Wyoming section of the Rocky Mountains. A second significant step followed nearly twenty years later through the passage of a bill which authorized the president to select and set aside large areas of western lands for forest reserves. Within a few weeks of the bill's passage, that is on March 31, 1891, a presidential proclamation withdrew from private entry more than a million and a quarter acres of land in order to form Yellowstone Park Timberland Reserve. This initial effort to further an avowed move for conservation was shortly implemented in Colorado by the establishment of the White River Reserve. During the remainder of the 1890s the president continued to add to the list of forest reserves. The first national park in Colorado embraced the Mesa Verde area (1906) in the southwestern corner of the state, and the next was Rocky Mountain National Park.

The distinction between the complementary forest reserve (later called national forest) and national park systems arises from their respective purposes. The reserves has been set aside for "wise current use" such as regulation of water supplies, selective timber cutting, regulated grazing, mining, hunting and recreational activities. In general, such activities are precluded from national parks, however, for the parks are designed to maintain in unimpaired form for the use of current and future generations, primitive and historic areas. The uses of parks include observation of and instruction about natural, phenomena and wildlife and the pursuit of out-of-door health and pleasures by visitors.

It might be noted that the gradual increase in the number of forest reserves (today there are 152 reserves enclosing 186,000,000 acres of land) led initially to the establishment of a Division of Forestry in the Department of the Interior, and later (1905) the Division was revamped into the Forest Service and placed under the Department of Agriculture.

Correspondingly, while at first each national park was administered as a separate unit under the Department of the Interior, by 1916 the National Park Service was organized to supervise the then twelve parks, which embraced four and one half million acres of land. The creation of this agency meant that for Rocky Mountain National Park there was only one year of independent operation under the Department of the Interior before the National Park Service began its task of coordination of the work and efforts of all the parks. But the Service provided guidance and help in meeting the various needs, so as to ensure promotion of many types of improvements, particularly those that required obtaining money from a somewhat reluctant Congress.

It is the purpose of the present study to trace with reasonable detail the administrative history of Rocky Mountain National Park from the time of its creation in 1915 to 1965. The author intends to review mainly the implementation of Park Service policies by administrators on the scene, rather than the fabrication of these policies by national officials. This history involves many controversies. They begin with the efforts of local and national individuals and organizations to establish the Park. Thereafter Park officials became involved in a dispute over granting a transportation monopoly and the ceding of jurisdiction over the Park's roads from state to federal authority. Litigation involved Colorado's officials and an early Park superintendent on the question of regulating traffic in the Park and finally was resolved by the Supreme Court of the United States.

After these early jurisdictional problems were decided, the Park's administrators turned their attention to improving the physical condition of the area. Old roads and trails were improved and new ones constructed. Foremost among these developments was the building of the famous Trail Ridge Road, which is the highest continuous auto road in the nation, crossing a pass at 12,183 feet and connecting Estes Park Village on the east with Grand Lake Village on the west. Further construction within the Park was carried on by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the depression years of the 1930's. The activities initiated under this government program, along with those of the Reclamation Bureau's Colorado-Big Thompson water diversion project, not only brought necessary changes to the Park area, but also helped to stimulate the region's economy.

Throughout the Park's eventful history, administrators worked to resolve a basic dilemma: how to preserve the wildlife and scenery in their natural state and still allow tourists to visit and explore the region. Included in the problems growing out of this dilemma were wildlife management, winter sports development, removal of private inholdings and concessions, and the extension of Park boundaries.

Heretofore, no comprehensive study has been made of the administrative history of Rocky Mountain National Park. Both popular and scholarly works have been published, however, concerning the early days of the Park, as well as the pioneer history of nearby towns. Useful for its reminiscences of the early days of Grand Lake's development is Mary Lyons Cairns' Grand Lake: The Pioneers. [1] For accounts of pioneer life in Estes Park, there are June E. Carothers' Estes Park, Past and Present [2] and Florence Shoemaker's "The Story of the Estes-Rocky Mountain National Park Region." [3] Enos A. Mills The Rocky Mountain National Park [4] provides a colorful view of the first seven years of the Park's existence.

Finally, Edwin C. Alberts' "Administrative History of Rocky Mountain National Park" [5] is a sketchy rendering of this aspect of Park history through 1952.

Despite these helpful secondary materials, primary sources proved to be more valuable for this monograph. An intensive study was made of the Superintendents' Monthly and Annual Reports filed in the Rocky Mountain National Park Library. Much useful material also was found in the library's files labelled "Historical Data." The Annual Reports of the Chief Park Naturalists were invaluable for an understanding of the naturalist service.

The author also relied heavily upon newspaper accounts. The weekly Estes Park Trail was thoroughly examined beginning with its first issue, April 15, 1921. In addition, the Rocky Mountain News and the Denver Post were sifted for their coverage of the more controversial aspects of the Park's history. Several other newspapers were drawn upon, notably The (Boulder) Daily Camera and the Boulder News-Herald, for their editorial comments on Park administrative policies.

Some sources were especially helpful for their contributions to specific topics. The Enos Mills correspondence for the years July 12, 1910, to July 9, 1915, found among the papers of J. Horace McFarland, contained important information on the struggle to create the National Park. Neal G. Guse's "The Elk of Rocky Mountain National Park" [6] provided a summary of decision-making which led to the reduction of elk in the Park.

Interviews either previously made or undertaken by the author substantiated and supplemented information for certain events in the Park's history. R. T. "Dixie" MacCracken, Robert Griffiths, Mary Lyons Cairns, Jack Moomaw, Fred McLaren, and Charles Hix contributed valuable data about the early days in the Park. On the efforts to create the Park, significant anecdotes were contributed by James Grafton Rogers, Morrison Shafroth, Henry Toll, and H. N. Wheeler. Mrs. Esther B. Mills consented to two interviews about the role of her husband, Enos Mills, in the transportation controversy. Former superintendent Edmund Rogers gave insights into the building of Trail Ridge Road. Life in the CCC camps was recalled by Merlin K. Potts and William James. Former superintendent David Canfield talked freely on a wide range of topics, including public relations, the Colorado Big-Thompson project, and the Hidden Valley winter sports development. Another former superintendent, T. J. Allen, Jr., described problems associated with boundary extensions. Controversies involving the rangers and naturalists were retold by Dr. Ferrel Atkins and Wayne Bates. The story of the Steads Ranch purchase was sketched by former superintendent Allyn Hanks. Finally, former management assistant Roger Contor ably summarized the philosophy underlying the creation of national parks.

This administrative history of Rocky Mountain National Park has been divided into thirteen chapters and a conclusion. The first reviews the history of the region from the time of the coming of the first white settlers to 1915. Particular attention is given to the region of Estes Park and Grand Lake, in which villages of the same names were developed. The struggle to establish a national park in the region is described in Chapter II. It emphasizes the striking character and notable contribution of Enos Mills. Chapters III and IV present a detailed account of the bitter controversy and court battles growing out of the federal government's

grant of a transportation monopoly for sight-seeing vehicles within the Park's boundaries. This account is followed by the story of the dispute over ceding jurisdiction of Park roads to the federal government.

The next three chapters deal with significant building projects within the National Park. Chapter VI surveys improvements in the Park's road and trail systems. Chapter VII describes the constructive contributions of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Chapter VIII concentrates on the building of the Colorado-Big Thompson water diversion project.

The remaining chapters encompass a variety of topics. Chapter IX discusses wildlife management policies, with particular emphasis on the question of elk and deer reduction. The evolution of the Department of Interpretation forms the theme of the next chapter. Because of the Park's obvious advantages for winter sports, the construction of various facilities, including the Hidden Valley ski and ice skating complex, warrants separate consideration. Chapter XII concerns administrative and legislative efforts to deal with private inholdings, concessioners and boundary extensions. Activities of the park rangers are highlighted in a final chapter, which is followed by a conclusion. Finally there is an appendix containing a roster of superintendents.

While all the many persons who have contributed to this study deserve my gratitude, several deserve special mention. The project would never have been initiated without the cooperation of Merrill Mattes of the National Park Service. During two summers at Rocky Mountain National Park, the author was aided in his research by Ranger Naturalist, Dr. Ferrel Atkins, Chief Park Naturalist Merlin K. Potts, and Assistant Park Naturalist Pat Miller. Finally, the quiet inspiration imparted to his men by former superintendent Allyn Hanks also had an impact on the author and helped to lighten the task of preparing the Park's administrative history.

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## ENDNOTES

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1. Mary Lyons Cairns, Grand Lake: The Pioneers (Denver, 1946).
2. June E. Carothers, Estes Park, Past and Present (Denver, 1951).
3. Florence Johnson Shoemaker, "The Story of the Estes-Rocky Mountain National Park Region," (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, Colorado State College, July 26, 1940).
4. Enos A. Mills, The Rocky Mountain National Park (New York, 1924).
5. Edwin C. Alberts, "Administrative History of Rocky Mountain National Park,"

typewritten manuscript (Rocky Mountain National Park, 1952).

6. Neal J. Guse, Jr., "The Elk of Rocky Mountain National Park," typewritten manuscript (Rocky Mountain National Park, 1962).